

Resource Management Spotlight:

2007 Goose Reductions at Summit Lake State Park



Resident populations of the Canada goose (*Branta canadensis maxima*) have been reaching proportions that have created serious management issues at Summit Lake State Park. Goose waste on the beach, in picnic areas and in bank fishing locations has a negative impact on visitor enjoyment of the park and results in increased operating costs for the property. Eroded shorelines are common as a result of goose grazing. If left unaddressed, the issues involved with these conditions could have adverse long-term effects on the ecology of Summit Lake.

The division of State Parks and Reservoirs is actively managing the problem with a series of three controlled goose reductions starting in September 2007 and ending in January 2008. This effort is intended as a management tool, used to address the issue of local-breeding, resident geese that would not naturally occur in such high densities. With thorough attention to detail, the focus of these reductions is to be as effective and safe as possible for the sake of the natural resources, reduction participants, and visitors of Summit Lake State Park.

Canada Geese and the Challenges They Present

- Like many species of wildlife, populations of the Canada goose have responded favorably to the modern landscape of fragmented forests, vast agricultural areas, and holding ponds.
- Large numbers of resident geese have severely grazed grass and low, woody vegetation from surrounding slopes of the lakeshore at Summit Lake. These denuded or sparsely covered areas are now visibly washing away at rates that far exceed any natural pace. Such erosion and sedimentation threatens water quality and the overall ecology of the lake itself. Another direct potential is the *eutrophication*, or over-fertilizing of the waters from the increase of nitrogen and other chemical nutrients leaching from goose waste near the shore. This results in excessive plant growth and lower available oxygen levels for other aquatic plants and animals.
- Large quantities of goose droppings and feathers in areas of the park is not uncommon. Unfortunately, many of these areas are also family oriented, heavily visited recreation sites such as shelters, concession stands, the beach, and boat docks.



The History at Summit Lake

- Extensive non-lethal management efforts have not been effective. Like many similar areas of the Midwest and eastern U.S., Summit Lake has done a lot in the past to deter geese from finding different areas of the park favorable. Audible disturbance, including shooting blanks and installing high-decibel distress call producers, has had only a temporary and limited effect.

- Physical disturbance, such as chasing and egg oiling, are very labor intensive and result in limited success. Egg oiling is intended to reduce population growth. Additional deterrent methods have included spraying grass with a commercial non-palatable chemical, and using physical barriers to make access to islands seem less appealing to the birds.

Managing the Issue with Goose Reductions

- Three rounds of reductions will occur between September and January. The first reductions will be on September 6th, 11th, and 13th. The second and third sets will take place on December 1st and 2nd, and December 15th and 16th. These dates have been specifically chosen to coincide with hunting seasons and to optimize the effectiveness of the effort given the local flight patterns and behavior of the birds. Shooting hours will be one-half hour before sunrise to sunset.
- The property will be closed to the public and be divided into approximately 20-30 hunting areas with one group of up to four individuals within each area. These areas will be separated by no less than a 120 yard buffer so that if participants are on the edges of their assigned boundaries, there is no chance of crossfire. Dogs, boats and temporary blinds will be allowed.
- Participating individuals will be randomly selected using the same drawing method as used for deer reductions. However, applications are submitted online only between October 15 & 28 at www.IndianaOutdoor.in.gov. Eligible participants must be 18 by September 6, 2007. No paper applications are accepted. According to current emergency rule permitting the goose reductions, all partners must be entered on the primary applicant's application to be eligible, but no hunter can apply more than once regardless of primary or buddy status. One individual will be able to apply for up to three additional "buddies" for specific reductions. Successful primary applicants will be mailed detailed registration packets from the property approximately four weeks in advance of each set of reductions. Included in these packets will be assigned areas for each group (20-30 available). The main gate will serve as a check station so the property can obtain harvest numbers. Participants will be given a check-in card upon arrival that will be returned at time of departure to allow us to determine the success of each reduction. Indiana Conservation Officers will be on hand to ensure compliance of this and all other areas of enforcement throughout the reduction efforts.
- Additional safety mechanisms will be in place as well. In an effort to reduce less effective shots being taken, individuals will be restricted to carrying no more than 15 shells into the field with them. All legal shell lengths with shot sizes ranging from 2's to triple B's will be permitted.



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